Chapter 16

Visual Resources

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INTRODUCTION

Alternative 4, "EBMUD-Only Lower American River Delivery," and Alternative 5, "Sacramento River Delivery," in this REIR/SEIS include facilities that are very similar to those discussed for Alternative 3, "Joint Water Supply," in the 1997 DEIR/EIS. A full discussion of the affected environment for these alternatives is therefore included in the 1997 DEIR/EIS, as is a section describing the terminology and methods adopted for completion of the visual assessment in relation to all of the REIR/SEIS alternatives. Since the facility locations for Alternative 6, "Freeport East Delivery," Alternative 7, "Freeport South Delivery," and Alternative 8, "Bixler Delivery" were not described in the 1997 DEIR/EIS, additional information is provided in the "Affected Environment" section below.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Description of existing visual resources focuses on areas where implementation of a project alternative would require construction of permanent aboveground facilities.

Existing Visual Resource Conditions

Alternative 4: EBMUD-Only Lower American River Delivery

The existing visual character surrounding Alternative 4 facilities is the same as that described for Alternative 3 in Chapter 16 of the 1997 Draft EIR/EIS. In summary, the visual character of the landscape at the intake facility on the American River, as described in Alternative 3, consists mostly of natural riparian elements, including the surface of the river. High to moderate levels of intactness and vividness would be apparent at both intake locations, depending on the direction from which the view is being evaluated. Views from the site to upstream portions of the American River Parkway are generally of higher quality than downstream views. Viewer exposure and sensitivity at either intake structure would be relatively high because of the high recreational use of the river and traffic volumes along I-5.

In addition to the facilities described for Alternative 3 in the 1997 DEIR/EIS, this alternative would include construction and operation of a WTP located in a field next to the Mokelumne Aqueducts, near the location of the proposed Mokelumne Aqueducts pumping plant. A full description of visual characteristics of the area are outlined Chapter 16 of the 1997 DEIR/EIS (Alternative 2). In summary, the visual character of the surrounding landscape is rural, with agricultural fields visible in all directions. Overall views near the treatment and pumping facilities location display moderate quality and intactness, due mostly to the minimal amount of urban encroachment in the area. Viewer exposure is limited to local residents traveling to and from semi-rural subdivisions south and west of the site. The proximity of these homes to the proposed developments could make viewer sensitivity moderate to high.

Alternative 5: Sacramento River Delivery

Alternative 5 facility locations and surrounding visual character would be the same as that summarized above for Alternative 4 except that the intake facility would be located on the Sacramento River immediately downstream of the confluence with the American River. This location is considered less sensitive visually because the river banks are generally more defined by levees and flood walls in the immediate area and other similar facilities, such as the City's Sacramento River intake, are located nearby.

Alternative 6: Freeport East Delivery and Alternative 7: Freeport South Delivery

The visual character of the landscape at the proposed intake facility north of Freeport consists generally of riverine elements, including the river surface and steep levee banks, with minimal riparian vegetation. Freeport marina, the closest commercial and residential area on the east side of the Sacramento River, lies approximately one mile south of the proposed location of the pumping facility, but the intake would not be visible from that location because of bends in the river. Other dominant structures in the area include a large water storage tank on the east bank of the river approximately 500 feet north of the intake facility and the I-5 bridge structure that passes over State Route 160 just north of the project site. Both structures are prominent and would be visible from the river at the proposed location of the pumping plant.

Visual resources in the vicinity of the pumping plant range from low to moderate intactness and vividness. Upstream views from the site are generally of lower quality than downstream views because of the proximity of the water storage tank and I-5 overpass. Views downstream are better because of the generally undisturbed nature of the riparian corridor.

Views of the intake facility from State Route 160 and South River Road (the road that parallels the west bank of the Sacramento River) would be blocked by the levee and trees lining the outward side of the levee. Recreational boaters on the Sacramento River and commuters travelling along the I-5 corridor over the Sacramento River and State Route 160 would most likely have the most frequent views of the intake facility. Boaters' exposure and sensitivity would be relatively high, given the high annual recreational use of the river and the proximity of the site to I-5. However, viewer exposure from I-5 would be limited to southbound travelers and of short duration due to the high speed of traffic.

The treatment facilities proposed as part of Alternative 6 would be located at the Mokelumne Aqueducts as described above for Alternatives 4 and 5. The treatment facilities for Alternative 7 would be located at Bixler. The visual character of the landscape at Bixler is predominately agricultural, with foreground views of an offshoot of Indian Slough, the Mokelumne Aqueducts, and the UPRR tracks. The most dominant feature in the immediate vicinity of the WTP would be the aqueducts, which runs approximately 10 feet above ground from the project site and continues east along Orwood Road.

Overall views near the treatment facilities have a low to moderate level of intactness and vividness. Viewer exposure to the treatment facilities would be moderate; traffic along Orwood Road is moderate and primarily serves the residential and agricultural landowners in the area.

Alternative 8: Bixler Delivery

The treatment facilities for this alternative are similar in scale, location, and visual sensitivity to those described above for Alternative 7. The intake facility would be constructed off of Indian Slough between existing elevated railroad tracks and the elevated sections of the Mokelumne Aqueducts.

Views toward the Mokelumne Aqueducts (from the south, east, or west of the proposed facility) are severely broken by the three large pipes that parallel the roadway. Views east from the facility, past the railroad tracks, have a more moderate level of intactness and vividness because of the continuity of the agricultural land and uniform resource use.

Relevant Policies and Ordinances

The construction of Alternative 4, "EBMUD-Only Lower American River Delivery," would require compliance with the American River Parkway Plan. A full discussion of this plan and the policies that were used in assessing visual resources impacts on the American River in the City are outlined in Chapter 16 of the 1997 DEIR/EIS. In summary, the following plan policies were applied in assessing the visual resource impacts on the American River in the City:

- Development within the Parkway shall be designed and located such that any impacts upon native vegetation is minimized.
- Impacts from new public utilities on the Parkway shall be minimized by clustering the facilities with existing facilities and parkway crossings, revegetating areas where utilities have been placed underground, and soundproofing pump stations.
- Structures that are in the Parkway or visible from the Parkway shall be of a design, color, texture and scale that minimize adverse visual intrusion into the Parkway.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Significance Criteria

The criteria used for determining visual resources impacts are outlined in Chapter 16 of the 1997 Draft EIR/EIS. In summary, impacts would be considered significant if implementation of an alternative would have substantial, demonstrable, negative aesthetic effects; result in permanent and substantial reduction in the visual quality of highly sensitive views; or conflict with adopted visual resource policies.

The impact assessment methodology used for analyzing Alternative 3 was applied to Alternative 4 and is presented in Table 16-1 of the 1997 DEIR/EIS. This methodology was based on a relative scale assessment of the visibility of the intake sites from major viewing areas, including the lower American River, the Jedediah Smith National Recreation Trail, the I-5 crossing, and the southern American River levee. Since the remaining four alternatives outlined in the REIR/SEIS are in varying locations, impact assessment was based on subjective judgements about how each facility would affect visual resources and common viewers in the area.

Impacts Found to Be Less Than Significant

Alternative 4: EBMUD-Only Lower American River Delivery

The impacts and mitigation requirements associated with Alternative 4 are similar to those described for Alternative 3 in the 1997 DEIR/EIS. These impacts include:

- Changes in views along transmission line alignment.
- Changes in visual resources at the intake location (for intake Site 5 under Alternative 3 in the DEIR/EIS).
- Changes in visual resources of the pipeline corridor.
- Changes in visual resources from changes in American River flows.
- Effect on heritage trees along C Street.
- Change in views of the Sacramento River WTP and intake structure.
- Changes in visual resources at the FSC and Mokelumne Aqueducts pumping plants.

As described in the 1997 DEIR/EIS, these impacts are less than significant. No mitigation is required.

Impact: Change in Visual Resources at the Site of the WTP near the Mokelumne Aqueducts. The treatment facilities near the Mokelumne Aqueducts would encompass approximately 27 acres. Depending on the level of treatment that EBMUD determines appropriate, the facility could include administrative and chemical buildings, solids handling facilities, a clearwell, and pumping station. Facility buildings would not exceed one to two stories and would be co-located with the Mokelumne Aqueducts pumping plant proposed under this alternative and described in Alternative 3 of the 1997 DEIR/EIS.

Construction of the treatment facilities would change the visual character of the site from an agricultural and rural residential setting to a built area consisting of the components described above. The close proximity of several suburban housing developments could mean that viewer sensitivity would be high. However, visual quality and viewer exposure to the site is low, and facility design plans would be required to be approved by San Joaquin County prior to construction. This impact is less than significant. No mitigation is required.

Alternative 5: Sacramento River Delivery

Visual impacts under this alternative would be similar to those described for Alternative 3 in the 1997 DEIR/EIS and summarized above under Alternative 4. However, since the intake structure would be located on the Sacramento River and not the American River, visual impacts on the Jedediah Smith National Recreation Trail and the American River Parkway would be eliminated. The impact of the intake structure on the Sacramento River is discussed below.

Impact: Change in Visual Resources at the Site of the Sacramento River Intake. Construction and operation of the intake would add a new built element just south of the confluence of the American and Sacramento Rivers. The intake structure would be identical to that described under Alternative 3 and would be designed with colors and architectural materials to make it compatible with the surrounding riverine environment. The intake could be visible from the southbound lanes of I-5. Boaters on the Sacramento River and lower American River would also be exposed to views of the intake facility; however, given the proximity of the intake facility to the Sacramento River WTP intake and the I-5 and Jibboom Street bridges, only a relatively small change in the intactness and vividness of the surrounding resource would be apparent. Recreational users utilizing the bike trail on the east side of the Sacramento River would not be exposed to the intake because of the steep nature of the levee and surrounding riparian vegetation. This impact is less than significant. No mitigation is required.

Alternative 6: Freeport East Delivery

Visual resources impacts resulting from the construction of the pipeline between the FSC and the Mokelumne Aqueducts and construction of the Mokelumne Aqueducts pumping plant and FSC pumping plant are identical to those described in the 1997 DEIR/EIS (Alternative 3). In summary, impacts from construction of the pipeline would be temporary and would occur in existing rights-of-way. Similarly, given the low viewer exposure and low visual quality of the pumping plant sites, construction and operation visual impacts at these two sites would be less than significant. No mitigation is required.

The impact of constructing treatment facilities at the Mokelumne Aqueducts is described above under Alternative 4. This impact is less than significant. No mitigation is required.

Impact: Change in Visual Resources at the Freeport Intake. The intake facility at Freeport would be constructed similarly to the intake facility described for Alternative 3 of the 1997 DEIR/EIS. It would be 100 to 125 feet long, 30 to 40 feet wide, and approximately 70 feet tall. An elevated discharge line would extend from the facility to the east bank of the river, placing the overall structure approximately one mile north of the Freeport Marina.

The intake would not be visible from most locations along both State Route 160 and South River Road, because of trees and the steep levee slopes. It would be visible from the southbound lane of I-5 and by boaters using the Sacramento River. Since the visual sensitivity of this location is much lower than the American River, viewer exposure would be less than that for Alternative 4 or 5. Similarly, given the proximity of the structure to the large water storage tank on the east bank of the river and the overpass for I-5 (both within 500 feet of the proposed construction site), viewer sensitivity would be low.

Based on the current land use in the area and lessened public use of the waterway, visual resources impacts at this intake structure would

be less than significant. No mitigation is required.

Impact: Changes in Visual Resources of the Pipeline Corridor Between Both Freeport and the FSC. The effects of construction and operation of the pipeline on visual resources would be temporary and would affect primarily city, county, and state roads. Only minor appurtenant pipeline facilities would be visible along the alignment from roadways. This impact is less than significant. No mitigation is required.

Alternative 7: Freeport South Delivery

Impacts from construction of the intake facility are identical to those outlined for Alternative 6. Similarly, impacts from construction of the pipeline between the intake facility and the Mokelumne Aqueducts would be similar to those described for pipeline construction under Alternative 6, with the exception that they would temporarily affect primarily state and county roads.

Impact: Changes in Visual Resources at the Bixler Treatment Facilities. The treatment facilities described under Alternative 4 are similar to those that would be required for the construction and operation of treatment facilities at Bixler under Alternative 7. The facility would be located adjacent to Orwood Road. Construction of the facility would introduce additional industrial elements to the visual character of the immediate area. Visual quality, intactness, and vividness at the site are low to moderate, depending on the resource view. This impact is less than significant. No mitigation is required.

Alternative 8: Bixler Delivery

The impacts associated with construction of the treatment facilities are essentially identical to those described under Alternative 7. Given the existing nature of the visual resources in the area and the limited exposure viewers would have to the new facility, visual resources impacts would be less than significant. No mitigation is required.

Impact: Changes in Visual Resources at the Bixler Intake Facility. For the intake facility, views from the south, east, or west of the proposed facility are broken and incoherent due mostly to the large aqueduct pipelines that bisect the horizon. Viewer exposure to the intake site is limited. Given the existing facilities, sensitivity would be low. Visual resources impacts would be less than significant. No mitigation is required.

Impact: Changes in Visual Resources from Installation of the Pipelines between Bixler and Concord. Under the advanced treatment option, treated water and brine pipelines would be built between the Bixler treatment facilities and Concord, California. Construction of the pipeline would occur entirely in the Mokelumne Aqueducts right-of-way and would not be visible upon completion of installation. The effects of construction and operation of this pipeline on visual resources would be temporary due to several crossings of city, county, and state roads. This impact is less than significant. No mitigation is required.

Significant Impacts and Mitigation Measures

None of the alternatives considered in this REIR/SEIS would result in significant impacts on visual resources, and no mitigation is required.